THEATERS — MOTION PICTURES

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MUSIC — ART

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The STAGE and its PEOPLE

Mary Kennedy and Eva Le Gallienne in "Not So Long Ago." WHITE STUDIO PHOTO

Frank Craven and Gladys Caldwell in "The Girl from Home." PHOTO WHITE STUDIO

George McKay and Louise Meyers in "Honey Girl." WHITE STUDIO PHOTO

Florence Carrette in "Oh! Henry Co," LEWIS-SMITH PHOTO

Georgia Hewitt and Frank Crumitt in "Betty Be Good" WHITE STUDIO PHOTO

F. H. Sothern as "Hamlet." PHOTO IRA D. SCHWARZ

As We Were Saying—

By Heywood Broun

"ALTHOUGH (being a woman) I naturally hesitate to confess it," writes Alice G. Palmer, "I suppose I must number myself among your veteran theatergoers, more especially since I have well over thirty years of playgoing behind me. But at least those years have brought some compensations, and one of them is the pleasure I take right now in defying Mr. J. Ranken Towse and other advocates of 'the dear dead days beyond recall' with the statement that I have never taken greater joy in the theater than during the last season, and never has what critical faculty I may possess been appealed to more frequently.

"I have seen a good half dozen (perhaps one or two more) superlatively good productions, and a larger number of superior ones. Moreover, I have seen a number of individual performances which I have not hesitated to place side by side with my most cherished memories of older players. Among the theatrical portraits of the year that I have thus hung in my gallery of the gods are the three Barrymores, particularly the amazing John, with his startling and almost incredible development in voice and art. In my opinion, also, his acting was the best of the year, for that matter of a number of years. I also remember with rare pleasure Frank Bacon, Margalo Gilmore (may the fates send her a Socrates for a mentor!), Blanche Bates (what a noble blossoming of winsome girlhood has been hers!), Pauline Lord, Gilda Varesi, Helen Hayes, the entire cast of 'Jane Clegg,' Lowell Sherman, Barney Bernard (within strict limits), Frank McGlynn, Clifton Crawford, Brandon Tynan and José Ruben. Nor should I overlook that very promising lad, Raymond Hackett.

"Incidentally, it strikes me that there are several reasons why we can take contemporary laments for the past with a very large grain of salt. In the first place, let us remember that the 'pie that mother used to make' was in large measure flavored by the appetite of youth. In the second place, the days when, according to these Jeremiahs, 'there were real actors,' fell well within the period which we call 'Victorian.' Well, that was an age of general floridity, when ready tears, swoons, gasping outcries, ecstatic gestures, convulsive grimaces and resounding oratory were esteemed indispensable to the expression of mental and emotional disturbance. Read the letters, biographies and novels of the time. Is it any wonder that our veteran critics find the playing of the present day 'tame,' which seems to be the chief cause of their quarrel with it? Watch Walter Hampden's 'Hamlet,' excellent in many respects, but also hopelessly out-moded in its tearful accents, self-consciousness and distractingly incessant movement, and then call to mind Mr. Towse's enthusiastic commendation of it.

"Few things are deader than most of the modes of thought, feeling and expression of the Victorian Age. The Anglo-Saxon world at least has grown far more reticent and critical regarding display of emotion. Therefore, to my mind, it is more than doubtful whether even the greatest of the actors of the past could re-create in us the thrills which their contemporaries enjoyed. Certainly, the accounts of some of Forrest's performances are not altogether reassuring. As a matter of fact the art of any number of idols did not survive the test of a second generation. Lester Wallack's did not, or at least the popular appreciation of it. Moreover, our older critics would do well to remember that there were dissenting voices from the general approval of even the gods themselves. Charlotte Cushman, Effie Germon, Joseph Jefferson and Henry Irving all considered Edwin Booth a magnificent reader, but not a great actor, and only one of these commentators could have been considered a rival, and he a most generous one, while two of them were Booth's devoted friends.

"And still another point which makes us wonder whether in the present day we are served inferior dramatic fare is the quality of former day audiences. Of course, there were any number of people of culture and refinement who enjoyed the drama, but read the signs which it was necessary to distribute thickly about even the first class theaters and reflect that both socially and religiously the theater was taboo or practically out of the ken of a comparatively enormous percentage of the educated portion of the public. Was there, indeed, such a wide gap between a large proportion of the playgoing public of that time and their entertainers? I sincerely believe that the actor to-day faces a more exacting and critical audience than did the actor of the past century, and that it is more difficult to make a conspicuous success. Unquestionably the audiences are larger and less specialized. And let us also not forget that whereas the first class players of the 'golden age' spent their time in a few of the larger cities, the actors of preëminent rank to-day must cover a continent.

"In 1897, four years after the death of Edwin Booth, Joseph Jefferson observed that, in his opinion, the acting of the day was quite equal to and in some respects superior to the acting of his youth, and in 1919 Forbes-Robertson practically reëchoed the sentiment. Like all living things, dramatic art must grow and change, and if it would continue to live it must be interpreted in accordance with the habits of thought and the modes of expression and feeling of the generation it serves."

We are not quite as mournful as some of the other reviewers because the motion picture possibilities of a play are now an important factor in determining production. Of course, it is not an ideal condition. But there never has been such a condition in the theater, and we never hope to see one. The motion picture factor is by no means all bad. In some respects it may exert a healthful influence upon our dramatic fare. For at least twenty years American drama has been handicapped by the fact that New York was unchallenged in dictating the styles. Plays were written particularly for Broadway audiences. The road might take them or leave them.

While it is true that dramatists in the search for subjects sometimes ranged north of Forty-second Street and south of the Battery, wherever they went they carried the New York point of view. We have been accustomed to seeing Kentucky colonels not as they are, but as New York imagines them, and all our rural plays are distinctly flavored by the city man's conception of the farmer and farm life. Not all our authors have been New Yorkers, but most dramatists after one success came here or hereabouts. Not infrequently the playwright who had begun by studying life came to the heart of the theatrical district and thereafter studied plays. All too often the output of a season has represented little more than the success of a previous season slightly altered.

With the huge movie public before him, it may be that the dramatist of the future will put New York in its place and take some thought of Des Moines and Galveston will no longer be possible to write of cowboys with the consoling thought, "These may not be the real thing, but they'll serve to convince Longacre Square." The time is coming when the playwright must remember that, though New York may be in the pit of his theater, there also are distant gallery gods perched upon the tops of the Rockies.

New York Debut of Ula Sharon

Ula Sharon, the sixteen-year-old American ballet dancer, will make her first New York appearance at Aeolian Hall Wednesday. She will be interpret music of Tschaikowsky, Brahms, Saint-Säens, Grieg, Chopin, Debussy and Hadley. She will be assisted by E. Robert Schmitz as pianist and by the Mendelssohn Male Quartet.

Eyre Chose Martinique Because Super-Culture And Near-Savagery Meet

Lawrence Eyre, the author of "Martinique," the West Indian romance playing at the Eltinge Theater, has duplicated in his latest play a feat that marked the writing of his "Miss Nelly of N'Orleans," in which Mrs. Fiske was starred. In both plays Mr. Eyre went South for color and richness of atmosphere, and in both cases cast his drama in a setting with which he was not personally familiar.

Much of the knowledge of creole life that was displayed in "Miss Nelly of N'Orleans" Mr. Eyre owed to conversations with a cousin who lived in the old French quarter of the Southern city; he also acknowledges the debt that he owes to George W. Cable, who gave the authentic touch to the creole dialogue of two of the characters as a labor of love for Mrs. Fiske.

But in "Martinique" Mr. Eyre has woven into the life of this French colony a story that has long, as he phrased it, been at the back of his head and that was very little changed for the stage. The play was frankly written for Josephine Victor, who shares stellar honors with Emmett Corrigan in "Martinique," because of the desire Mr. Eyre had to give Miss Victor the fullest opportunity to demonstrate what she could do. The character of Zabette is essentially a testimonial of the playwright's confidence in the star.

"Martinique appealed to me as the scene for this play," said Mr. Eyre, "because it is the meeting place of the French, the super-civilized race of the earth, and the negro, a generation from the Congo. Intermarriage of the two races has given to Martinique women that can be found in no other place on earth, exotic creatures with all the alluring traits o fthe Frenchwoman, but with a certain strange something added.

"Some one has said," he went on, "that life in Martinique is a continual grand opera. Some of the critics said that the play was like the libretto for a grand opera; this was an effect that I was striving for, to show the volcanic, theatrical life of these people, to give the color and richness of that exotic life. These people who live over a volcano seem to have in their character something of the nature of the volcano. In the second act, the auction sale expresses some of the surge and color and volatility of the life of Martinique.

"You have living side by side people like the de Chauvalons, who represent the old aristocracy of France, and people of the type of Quembo, in whom are to be found the appetites of the savage and some of the desires of the civilized man. Every author is supposed to have his favorite characters, and Marie-Clemence is mine. She has led a sheltered life, and has been brought up in the aristocratic tradition. nto the barrenness of her life there comes this opportunity to marry Stephane and to continue the de Chauvalon line. Then comes Zabette and Marie-Clemence becomes involved by circumstances stronger than herself. She did not love Stephane for himself, but for the sake of the property and the heir that he would bring; but she will not surrender him to this girl who has already won his affection.

"There you have Marie-Clemence, a woman not essentially bad, yet forced by circumstances into plotting against Zabette and Stephane, her husband in name alone, through Quembo, the most hated man in Martinique.

"As for Zabette, the part was written with Miss Victor in mind. She has, in fact, been waiting to play it because of her faith in the part and the play. I have watched her stage career since the first, and felt that she must have the rôle. That I was right in my judgment is, I think, established by the exceptional restraint with which she plays this part."

Dorothy Dickson Talks Of Costumes and Their Influence on Dancing

Dorothy Dickson is one dancer who comes out firmly against the popular conviction that dancers should wear as little clothes as possible in order not to be hampered in their work. Many are the attractions which help to make "Lassie," at the Nora Bayes, the delightful and dainty musical comedy that it is, and one of them is the graceful dancing of Miss Dickson and her partner, Carl Hyson.

"How do you manage to flitter about so easily?" Miss Dickson was asked. "Don't the hoopskirts get in your way?"

"The truth is that one must fit the dancing in the costumes, as well as vice versa. Our hoop-skirted ancestors danced the minuet, because it lent itself to the clothes of the period! The classic dancer, who aims to bring out the graceful lines of the body, adopts the flimsy drapery. The exponents of the 'shimmy' of the present day are usually seen in snug-fitting gowns to accentuate the character of the dance."

New Theatrical Offerings of the Week

MONDAY—At the Globe Theater Charles Dillingham will present "The Girl From Home," a farce with music, founded on Richard Harding Davis's "The Dictator." Frank Craven wrote the book and lyrics and Silvio Hein the music. Included in the cast are Frank Craven, Gladys Caldwell, Flora Zabelle, Marion Sunshine, Jessica Brown, William Burress, Jed Prouty, John Park, Russell Mack, John Hendricks, George E. Mack, Edouard and Elisa Cansino and others.

At the Cohen & Harris Theater Sam H. Harris will present "Honey Girl," a musical comedy based on "Checkers," by Henry Blossom. Edward Clark wrote the book, Neville Fleeson the lyrics and Albert Von Tilzer the music. Edna Bates, Lynne Overman, Louise Meyers, George McKay, Sidonia Espero, Edmund Elton, Robert Armstrong and William A. Mortimer are included in the cast.

At the Shubert Theater for their second week in Shakespearean repertoire E. H. Sothern and Julia Marlowe will be seen in "Hamlet" Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday nights and in "The Taming of the Shrew" Thursday and Friday nights and Saturday matinee.

TUESDAY—At the Casino Theater "Betty, Be Good," a musical comedy adapted from a French vaudeville, with music by Hugo Riesenfeld and lyrics by Harry B. Smith, will have its première. The cast includes Josephine Whittell, Vivienne Oakland, Eddie Garvie, Irving Beebe, Frank Crumitt, Josie Intropidi, Georgia Hewitt, Lucille Manion, Frances Grant, Ted Wing and others.

At the Booth Theater the Shuberts will present "Not So Long Ago," a comedy in three acts by Arthur Richman. In the cast are Eva Le Gallienne, Sidney Blackmer, Mary Kennedy, Thomas Mitchell, Esther Lyon, Gilbert Douglas, Albert Reed, Margaret Mosier, Mollie Adams and Leatta Miller.

WEDNESDAY—At the Fulton Theater Theodore C. Deitrich will present "Oh, Henry," a farce-comedy by Bide Dudley. The cast includes Dallas Welford, Jane Wheatley, Spencer Charters, Roland Hogue, Edwin Walters, Clay Carroll, Florence Carrette and Eva Condon.

American Audience Best In World, Says Author Of "Not So Long Ago"

Since the days when it was comparatively safe to travel in America this country has welcomed many foreign visitors, has given them dinners and parades, and has thereafter read very meekly the caustic words that these several visitors have written after their return to their own several countries. The war interrupted this custom; and the visitors since the armistice have done no little, by force of their complimentary discoveries, to bring Americans out of their ancient humility.

It came less as a shock, then, to hear Arthur Richman, the author of "Not So Long Ago," the comedy which will open on Tuesday evening at the Booth Theater, praise the taste of American audiences. In the days before the war it would have been considered indelicate; now—even if comparisons be odious—it gives us a comfortable feeling to talk more frankly.

"We are not writing better plays than they are in Europe," said Mr. Richman, "but we are producing better plays. This last season—the last two or three seasons—there have been better plays produced in New York than in London, say, or in Paris. I believe that the taste of the American audience is to-day better than that of the audience of any other country in the world. It is true that we have welcomed among our most notable successes plays by Italian, French, Spanish, Irish and Russian dramatists, but the last season also saw the production of 'Beyond the Horizon,' by Eugene O'Neill, a native dramatist. His success and the attitude of the American public toward the stage at present can only encourage American dramatists. There has been in the past too great a tendency to call upon our native dramatists for popular successes of no permanent value and upon the foreign dramatists for plays of serious worth. The managers who have blindly indorsed foreign plays because they were foreign and the playwrights who have too easily surrendered to the bogey of 'giving the public what it wants' share the responsibility for this condition."

This statement of a belief in the critical judgment of American audiences was not with Mr. Richman a preliminary to a eulogy of his own play. It was with some difficulty that he was induced to talk of "Not So Long Ago"; then he spoke briefly of what he termed 'a' light romantic comedy of the '70s." "Not So Long Ago" will bring to New York audiences the leisurely New York of nearly fifty years ago, when Grant was President. There will be interest and perhaps envy aroused in the feminine members of the first night audience by the costumes that are to be brought to the stage of the Booth Theater. Mr. Richman has spent many days over the files of "Godey's Lady's Book" and "Harper's Bazar" to bring back the appealing dress of those far-off days, when there were no "outlaw" strikes, no telephones or telephone service, no overall parades.

"It is light, intentionally," explained Mr. Richman. "If the audiences that we have found on the road are any criterion, I believe that New York will also find it amusing."

Arbuckle in Feature Comedy

The first of the five real feature comedies in which Roscoe (Fatty) Arbuckle is to star, by arrangement of the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation and Joseph M. Schenck, will be "The Life of the Party," from a short story by Irwin S. Cobb,

On Actor Depends Future of a Classical Repertory Theater, Says E. H. Sothern

THE return of E. H. Sothern and Julia Marlowe to New York after an impressively successful tour in Shakespearean repertory has suggested to a few friends of the American theater that the immediate future might bring classical repertory to American audiences as it has not been brought in years.

It was with this in mind that several questions were put to Mr. Sothern.

"What is your opinion as to the possibility of establishing a classical repertory theater in the United States, either through municipal theaters in the larger cities, through stock companies or through a combination of both?" he was asked.

"Possibility means, first of all, I suppose, commercial possibility," replied Mr. Sothern. "The rapid growth of the greater metropolitan centers of population, such as New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and Boston, has made these cities capable of supporting either municipal theaters or stock companies. The experience of Ben Greet in London, where he has been playing Shakespearean repertory to audiences of children for a year with great success, or the success of John Craig in Boston; the successful tours of our own company or that of Mr. Mantell—these are only a few illustrations of the commercial possibilities in classical repertory.

"There must be, however, no attempt to compete with the commercial theater on the part of those who lead such a movement. The repertory should be limited to the two or three standard dramas that each generation has given to the stage and to the great classics of English drama."

"But can actors be found to-day," Mr. Sothern was asked, "who will be willing to take up this work? There are, after all, richer rewards for less arduous work."

"Any movement such as we have spoken of must come from the actor," answered Mr. Sothern. "The great ambition of the actor, if he be sincere at all, is to distinguish himself, and it is through the classical drama that he can satisfy this ambition. The movement for a classical repertory theater demands first of all a leader, a manager of the proper imagination and vision. It may also need at the first a financial support that it is almost certain to win from friends of the American theater. But it will receive its strongest impetus from the actors who associate themselves with it.

"For the actor there are no parts like those in Shakespearean drama. Himself a complex being, he finds in Hamlet as complex a creation—a melancholy man, yet with his moments of humor—as many-sided a being as men are in reality. Let an actor play a thousand parts, and he is yet bringing himself to the possibility of playing a few parts well; he is developing the possibilities of the instrument that is himself. The truly great parts that the Shakespearean dramas given to the actor compensate for the years that he has given to the study of diction and voice control, to the conquering of an obstinate body. In short, the ambition of the sincere actor to distinguish himself in great parts will make him the warmest supporter of classical repertory. It is, of course, through the stock company, that best of dramatic schools, that the next generation of actors should come to the American stage."

"Your own successful tour," we suggested, "would seem to indicate that the public would be hospitable to such a movement."

"In Chicago," Mr. Sothern continued, "at the close of the matinee performance of one of the comedies in our repertory a youngster in the audience whispered audibly, 'This beats the nickel show.' That was a historic remark. It reveals so truly the reaction of those who see Shakespeare for the first time, and who find in the poetry and the color and the vitality of the plays something far better than the nickel shows. They find nothing in the plays which they cannot understand; they find the music of good diction and of the well turned phrase, the grace of gesture and movement; most of all, they find a vitality that is not in the nickel show. They come away from the theater better people.

"It is unfortunate that Shakespearean plays have been so often called 'highbrow' dramas. They were originally written for a contemporary audience; they have survived because they are better plays than others that were written at the time. The people in every generation who would set up an aristocracy of artistic enjoyment are largely responsible for a certain distrust of Shakespearean drama that exists. It is an unfortunate fact, for once people can be induced to come to see Shakespeare they will find entertainment that can be given them by few plays; one has only to hear the laughter and applause of an audience of children seeing a Shakespearean play for the first time to know that.

"In the long run," continued Mr. Sothern, "the public gets what it wants. If people go to farces adapted from the French or to melodramas it is because they like them. To attract the public one must give them a good play—good entertainment—and give it to them at a reasonable price. Any movement such as we have spoken of must satisfy both of those conditions: the first, by limiting its repertory to standard dramas—in other words, to the plays that have been good enough to survive; and the second, by keeping its prices at a reasonable level and avoiding competition with the commercial theater. For if a classical repertory theater is to have any significance it must not do the things that can be done as well by the commercial theater; it must, instead, do the things that competent actors and excellent will enable it alone to do."

Hugo Riesenfeld Tells Why a Violinist Should Compose Musical Comedy

If Hugo Riesenfeld were writing this he would merely say: "There is nothing in this genius talk. Our brightest minds often spend themselves in vain dreamings or in vain lamentation at the coldness of a world which refuses to help their genius come to light. From the few really great men I have known I have drawn the conclusion that success—production of things that make you happy to produce—is more dependent on one's ability to sit tight than to think brilliantly."

"Which may or may not explain how the young violinist, orchestral conductor, composer of light and heavy music and director of the Rivoli, Rialto and Criterion theaters manages to find time to eat and sleep, and sometimes to see his family. The fact is he does all three. And, in addition, he finds time to play, to go to good shows, to hear the opera, to attend good recitals—in a word, to lead rather a normal life. And all the time he manages to get in about fourteen hours a day of hard work.

Tuesday evening "Betty, Be Good," a musical comedy for which Mr. Riesenfeld wrote all the music in the midst of his other jobs, will open at the Casino. Of course, Mr. Riesenfeld, who conducts only four times a day at the Rialto, will find time to wield the baton for his latest offspring.

"Betty, Be Good," is the third composition by a violinist to come into a New York house this season. Fritz Kreisler and Eddy Brown were Mr. Riesenfeld's predecessors in the composition of musical comedies. Zimbalist also has written one, and Mischa Elman has been engaged to do the same thing. Mr. Riesenfeld was asked whether there was any special significance in this fact.

"The explanation is simple enough," he said. "The violin is par excellence the instrument of melody—and melody only. It does not stand by itself as a maker of music. It needs an accompaniment. The violinist studies melody. Often he is not the thorough musician that the pianist becomes, but he does study and invent his specialty. Now, musical comedy is the simple composition of melody. It is not like grand opera or even symphonic poems—it is mere tune. So it stands to reason that the violinist who has studied his business is often best fitted to write the music of musical comedies."